DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 363 759 CE 065 030

TITLE Strategies for Working with Employers and Union Reps. How To Respond to Common Reasons for Not Hiring Women in NTOs.

INSTITUTION Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc., Washington, D.C.

PUB DATE 93

NOTE 5p.; Prepared by the Nontraditional Employment Training Project.

AVAILABLE FROM Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc., 1325 G Street, N.W., Lower Level, Washington, DC 20005-3104.

PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.

DESCRIPTORS Attitude Change; Change Strategies; *Employer Attitudes; *Employment Practices; Federal Legislation; *Females; *Nontraditional Occupations; Postsecondary Education; Sex Bias; *Sex Discrimination; Sex Fairness; *Unions

ABSTRACT

This paper provides tips for approaching employers and labor union representatives on the issue of hiring more women in nontraditional occupations, suggesting ways to respond to common excuses for not hiring women in such occupations. The paper first lists general strategies for developing a good working relationship with employers and union representatives, then outlines ways to respond to objections to hiring women. The following issues are addressed: women's supposed lack of interest, women's competence and qualifications, protective claims, reasons extraneous to job performance, and other frequent excuses. (KC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 363 759

Wider Opportunities for Women, Inc.

A nonprofit tax-exempt Women's Employment Organization
1325 G Street N.W., Lower Level, Washington, D.C. 20005-3104 (202) 638-3143

STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS AND UNION REPS

How to Respond to Common Reasons for Not Hiring Women in NTOs

You want your relationships with employers and union representatives to result in nontraditional employment opportunities for women. Therefore, it's to your advantage to develop a cooperative relationship with them. Expect to confront some traditional and sexist attitudes. Part of the challenge is broadening their thinking about women's roles in the workforce. With that in mind, here are some tips for best approaching employers and labor representatives.

General strategies for developing a good working relationship with an employer/contractor:

- be well-informed about the industry;
- know the entry routes into positions;
- know the apprenticeship system;
- research the labor market projections for the area;
- don't come in as a "know-it-all" or enforcement agent, but as a resource to assist employers in meeting affirmative action goals and increasing productivity -- a *"tell me how I can help you"* approach;
- don't stress employing women as an issue of compliance, but as a good business practice that will benefit the employer; and
- if you have personal experience in the trades, use it as a source of credibility.

General strategies for developing a good working relationship with union representatives:

- all of the above suggestions for employers, plus;
- know the local unions;
- mention your union affiliations, if any;
- express support for union activity -- details such as using stationery with a union-made seal will be noticed by union leaders and definitely work to your advantage; and
- stay informed on the national labor movement/be able to talk intelligently about union activity outside of your area.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN **OTHER THAN PAPER COPY** HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C Marano

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

CE 065 030

Prepared by:

The Nontraditional Employment Training (NET) Project with the insights of
Ronnie Sandler and Lauren Sugerman of the National Tradeswomen's Network

Below are reasons employers and unions frequently use for not employing more women in nontraditional jobs, followed by suggested ways to respond:

THE STANDARD

"Women are not interested in nontraditional work."

Nontraditional training programs are unable to meet the demand -- they consistently turn women away who are interested in training. Once they are aware of the opportunities in NTOs -- and the pay -- women are very interested. The issue really isn't that they have no interest in NTOs, women in general are just not aware of or do not consider NTOs as an option.

The best response: *Ask for 20 applications, get them filled out by interested, qualified women and return them to the employer as soon as possible.*

ISSUES OF COMPETENCE/QUALIFICATIONS

"Women are not strong enough for this type of work."

When claims like these are made, you need to call the employer's bluff. *What are the strength requirements for this job?* Once you are talking about demonstrations of ability, it's easier to point out that *while some women may not have the strength necessary, some men don't have it either.*

Strength is also an issue of training and conditioning. Women have considerable lower-body strength that can be developed for heavy lifting tasks. When necessary, women can also do upper-body physical conditioning to prepare for jobs.

Women in traditionally female jobs have demonstrated that they can develop great strength. Waitresses working banquets are required to walk up and down stairs carrying dozens of heavy trays. Nurse's aides are expected to lift and move patients weighing hundreds of pounds.

Employers are likely to exaggerate the strength needed for a job. Men and women can often use their brains instead of brawn to move things (i.e., using leverage or pulleys to move bundles of shingles to the roof of a house instead of carrying them). Where heavy lifting is required, hydraulic lifts and other machines are used on today's work sites.

"Women do not have the necessary skills."

Again, ask what these necessary skills are. *What are your general requirements for an entry-level position?* Women often don't have the background knowledge men do on tools, blueprints, etc., but they certainly can learn. Women in traditional office jobs use extensive math in bookkeeping. And women working in hospitals utilize large equipment and tools.

Don't try to sell women as having more skills than they have, but point out transferrable skills. Women work with mechanical equipment all the time in the home and in offices. *How different is following a blue print from following a dress pattern?*

Also, point out that here is an opportunity to train someone with the skills you'd like them to have. They don't come in with preconceived ideas of how things *should* be done.

PROTECTIVE CLAIMS

"The work is too dangerous for women."

Women are willing to take calculated risks and know that many aspects of their lives are dangerous. The employer is implying that women need to be protected. *If a woman chooses to enter a job knowing the risk, it isn't too dangerous for her.*

The issue of general workers' safety should be considered before the risk to women.

"Women can't take the rough language on the work site."

Unfortunately, women are as likely to encounter rough language while walking by some work sites as when working on them. Women also don't need to be shielded from the behavior of male workers; many of those men probably go home and use that language with their wives.

Of course, the employer has a responsibility to provide a workplace free of harassment or offensive language that would be targeted at other employees, but tolerating generally crude language is something workers in all jobs have to do to a degree.

REASONS EXTRANEOUS TO JOB PERFORMANCE

"Women need to take care of children."
"There are too many child-care problems with nontraditional hours."

Both men and women have family responsibilities. Women have found ways of meeting their professional and personal obligations; it's demonstrated, in fact, that women do not have higher absentee rates than men.

While arranging child care can sometimes be difficult for women working "odd" hours, women in NTOs are more likely to be able to afford quality, reliable child-care services.

When it is the case, point out that women have support systems helping them with child care and emergency backup plans.

"There is not enough work to go around."
"Men need the jobs more than women do."

The reality is that many women are the sole supports of their families and desperately need good paying work. NTOs can pay twice or three times as much as a traditional female job. There are also plenty of women with no income other than their own or who are needed to help support a family -- they need a job as much as anyone.

"The wives of male workers will get jealous."

Would you actually let a spouse's reaction dictate who you will and will not hire? Men and women work together on the job all the time; what makes construction (or whatever) less professional? Would you refuse to hire a woman as a secretary because the wives of some employees would object?

SOME OTHER FREQUENT EXCUSES

"Women are a distraction to men on the job site."

Men and women work together in practically all industries. And who really is the problem -- the distractor or the distracted? If men cannot concentrate on the job, then perhaps they should consider other work; however, they are going to encounter women in just about every work setting.

"We have no restrooms or changing facilities for women."

Then get some. All workers -- men and women -- are entitled to private facilities. But they don't necessarily have to be **separate** facilities. Perhaps the solution is as simple as putting a lock on the restroom door or installing a sign that can be flipped to "men" or "women" for the occupant.

"Women don't like to get dirty."

Women are willing to do a lot for good paying work. They realize that whatever dirt they get on them at work will wash off.

Also, many traditionally female jobs are quite dirty. The mess encountered in hospitals is probably worse than axle grease. Yet, women work as nurses and hospital cleaners. And any woman who has raised children is familiar with dirt. Few things are dirtier than soiled diapers.

"The union is keeping us from hiring more women."
"The contractor doesn't hire the women we refer."

Employers and unions will often point the finger at each other. Tell the union to alert you of any unfair hiring practices they suspect. Ask them what records they have of unfair hiring. Likewise, remind contractors that they are the agent responsible for meeting affirmative action goals -- not the unions. Also remind them that a contractor can go outside the union to hire if necessary.

"The men on my sites don't want to work with women."

There is some strong resistance on the part of men to women entering nontraditional jobs. The prevalence of sexual harassment is evidence. But the opposition of workers shouldn't keep an employer from fulfilling fair hiring practices and practicing good business sense.

The only way men are going to accept working with women in nontraditional jobs is for more women to get into those jobs. Suggest that the company and union have a workshop for employees on successfully receiving women in NTOs into the workplace.

"Women are afraid of sexual harassment on the job."

Women face the threat of sexual harassment in every line of work. And the obstacles they may face in nontraditional jobs are not keeping them from pursuing training.

What can we do to assure women don't have to fear sexual harassment on your work sites? Who should we start educating on the subject?

"Women will drop out after I invest in training them."

Ask if men drop out after being trained. *Do you really have a greater percentage of women leaving work?* Employers often base their perceptions on experience they have had with one or two women on their sites.

Perhaps it would be more important to look at the universal reasons why men and women would leave your job sites.